

**The Faction Paradox Protocols,
Volume Four:**

"In the Year of the Cat"

by
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(22/06/02)

Pre-Credits Sequence

F/X: Fade in to the background noise of the House of Lords (so possibly the same kind of background used for the Eleven-Day Empire's Parliament in Volumes 1 & 2). There's a definite murmuring from those present, but it's a muted one, as if they're ready to hear someone speak.

GEORGE: My Lords. Loyal peers of the realm. Gentlemen.

F/X: The murmuring dies down.

GEORGE: You will no doubt have noticed that in the two years since I took the throne of this splendid nation, I've not made a habit of appearing before you. This is certainly not because I've had little to say. Nor is it because I am in any doubt of your support. Indeed, quite the contrary.

F/X: Some laughter from the Lords, but it's not good-natured. Evidently there are a lot of people here who *don't* support the King.

GEORGE: But I trust this House, this noble institution, to overcome the pettiness of political faction and... come what may... to put the interests of our country and our sovereignty above all else. **[In a more grave and confidential tone.]** I need not tell any of you that for these past six years, Britain has been involved in a bloody and expensive war...

F/X: Some objection from the Lords. We hear the voice of one of the politicians (a two-line bit part) calling out from elsewhere in the hall, so we can only just make it out. After that the hubbub dies down again.

DEVONSHIRE: *A just war, your Majesty.*

GEORGE [irked and determined]: A *bloody* and *expensive* war. It has never been my belief that the conflict with France can be brought to a conclusion by hurling more men, more ships and more cannon at the enemy, with no regard for the consequences.

F/X: The audience isn't entirely on his side. More objections, but this time they're just annoyed mutterings and nobody cries out.

GEORGE: It is a wise man who can claim a victory without firing one shot more than he must. Which is why I come here before you, in person, to seek your assent in a different form of venture. A new approach to warfare altogether. To gain your approval for a force which... though not native to these shores... will so impress itself on the hearts and minds of this nation's enemies that no more British blood shall be spilt in vain.

F/X: The Lords don't think much of this. Another politician risks calling out.

POLITICIAN [from the back]: German mercenaries!

GEORGE [very irked]: Not Germans! My Lords and loyal supporters... if you wish to know the nature of this force, then of course, you shall. I propose that tomorrow morning, the army shall be presented not only to you but to the capital itself. The people, like this Parliament, will be able to judge in fairness this glorious new development in the British cause.

F/X: The muttering goes on. Devonshire speaks from his seat again, this time in a more tempered fashion.

DEVONSHIRE: Your Majesty... with respect, might we know who wrote this speech of yours?

GEORGE [levelly]: My most trusted advisor.

F/X: The Lords aren't sure about this, either. There are obviously arguments between members going on all around. The noise doesn't abate,

and the King speaks over it.

GEORGE [raising his voice]: I am quite sure that you will not invoke my displeasure in this matter. With your blessing, at ten o'clock tomorrow morning the army will march from Pall Mall to the banks of the Thames, and history will be changed forever!

F/X: The objections grow louder, although there are supporters of the King in the House and it sounds more like squabbling than revolution. The sound of arguing voice reaches its peak, and then...

GRAMS: Title music.

NARRATOR-MACHINE: The ancient story, if it pleases your gracious ears, maintains that before the Buddha left this world for the Heavens he was attended by both the finest thinkers and the basest animals. There were twelve beasts who visited the Buddha in that time, from the lowly snake to the most humble dog: and in reward for their attentions, the twelve years of the calendar were named in their honour. From that day on, it was said that the man born in the Year of the Rat would be gifted with the sense to find reward in the smallest of places, while the man born in the Year of the Tiger would be born with the passion and integrity of Emperors. **[Slightly more ominous.]** And yet it must be related that one animal slept through its calling, and was too involved in its own dreaming to bask in the Lord Buddha's enlightenment. Those who know the ways of animals will not be surprised by the identity of this unruly beast. It was the only creature which can, to this day, turn its nose up at the world even as it falls on its feet.

F/X: We start to fade in to the background of the Service's prayer-chamber, as we heard it in Volume Three. The whispering of the Servicemen continues, the same prayers/ meditations as before.

NARRATOR-MACHINE: My Lords and Ladies may make their own judgements as to the truth of such things, but this unworthy narrator would

suggest that in any age there will be at least one beast who refuses to respect the traditions of others..

4.2

F/X: The background whispering carries on for a short while... and then, suddenly, it's interrupted by the muffled sound of Justine's shadow-weapon. There's the splintering of wood, suggesting that the weapon's just broken open a door. The whispers falls into disarray.

JUSTINE: Gentlemen.

F/X: The sound of scraping and scrambling, a dozen or so people hurrying to get to their feet. The prayers are replaced by the sounds of mild panic.

JUSTINE: Please, gentlemen, I'm sure most of you are aware of my reputation. If any of you would like to engage me in combat then I'll be happy to oblige, but it'll hardly be to your advantage.

F/X: A sword being drawn from its scabbard. As in Volume Three.

D'EON: And you'll find, my Lords, that I *also* have a reputation. Although perhaps a master of the sword isn't a remarkable enough opponent for your tastes.

ELIZA: And apparently I'm just here for moral support.

F/X: Shadow-weapon strike, quickly followed by a crash as another piece of furniture meets its maker.

ELIZA: I can still do *that*, though.

F/X: A pause. Then the sound of several pairs of feet, scurrying for the exit. Once the first few Servicemen have started moving, others follow their

example, until everybody's heading for the door. Within moments the place is clear and the footsteps fade away. All's quiet.

D'EON: Victory without battle. Sun-Tzu would have approved.

JUSTINE: Although your intervention was hardly required, monsieur.

D'EON: I beg your pardon?

JUSTINE: The Servicemen are superstitious. I think the presence of Faction Paradox scared them a great deal more than the prospect of battle.

D'EON [unbowed]: I see. Then do I have my Lady's permission to sheath my weapon?

ELIZA [clearly uncomfortable about them fighting]: Look, can we get on with this?

D'EON: Of course. I didn't see Lord Bute among those men.

ELIZA: There's another stairway at the back of the hall. Basement level?

D'EON: The director's shrine.

JUSTINE: "Shrine"?

D'EON: Perhaps "chapel" might be a better word. The Service has a *penchant* for the mystical. Their acting director has to think like a priest. Especially if he's a Jacobite like Bute.

ELIZA: Just like home.

Fade.

F/X: If the prayer-chamber has any kind of special acoustic (e.g. an echo of some kind) then this scene should have a similar acoustic, suggesting a different part of the same building. Footsteps hurry down a hard staircase.

BUTE [hissing to himself]: They're here. Dear Christ our Saviour, they're here already.

F/X: Bute stops at the bottom of the stairs.

BUTE [panicking]: Candles. Light the candles.

F/X: Matches being struck. Candles being lit. As quickly as possible.

BUTE [reciting hurriedly, not very reverential]: Lord keep vigil for me, for I walk in the fields of the enemy but will not falter. Father, King and Patriot. Vox regis, vox dei. Hear the plea of the servant of your estate.

F/X: Bute blows out the candles.

BUTE: This had better work.

Fade.

4.4

F/X: Prayer-chamber acoustic.

D'EON: Nothing here of interest. Some prayerbooks. A few Masonic items.

ELIZA: Prayerbooks?

JUSTINE: Naturally. Whatever its other interests, the Service is still loyal to the English church.

D'EON: And to the English King.

JUSTINE: Not necessarily.

D'EON: Then you're suggesting that Bute -

JUSTINE [suddenly]: Quiet.

F/X: There is indeed a new sound in the air. Though it's too faint to make out at first, it's actually the same noise the automaton makes when it walks. If it makes a difference to the stereo "picture", then it's coming from the same place where Justine entered and the Servicemen left.

D'EON: Footsteps. Along the hall.

ELIZA: Sounds like machinery.

JUSTINE: The automata.

D'EON: Here?

F/X: The sound becomes loud enough to make out, although it's some distance away and obviously outside the room. We start to realise that there are several pairs of feet this time, more than one of the machines clicking and whirring its way along the hall.

JUSTINE [not panicking at all]: Eliza. D'Eon. Search the rest of the building. Look for any trace of Bute.

ELIZA: You're sure you're up to this?

JUSTINE: I've fought one of these devices before. I hardly think I'll have any more difficulty with the others.

F/X: D'Eon draws the sword again.

JUSTINE: And I doubt your sword will be of much use here, *Sieur*.

D'EON: I wouldn't ask you to drop your shadow, *Cousin*.

ELIZA [breaking them up]: Come on. Let's try the next floor down.

F/X: The footsteps are still approaching. D'Eon pauses for a moment before sliding the sword back into the scabbard.

D'EON: As you say.

F/X: Eliza and D'Eon hurry across the room in the other direction, but this is barely audible over the sound of the automata. The machines' footsteps come to a halt, and there's a moment of silence, giving us the impression that they've stopped in the doorway.

JUSTINE: So. Reinforcements.

Fade.

4.5

F/X: Same acoustic as the room where Bute lit the candles (well, it would be, it's the same room). This time it's Eliza and D'Eon who move down the staircase, a lot more slowly than Bute did.

ELIZA: Yep. Looks like a shrine to me.

D'EON: Tell me... were you ever a soldier?

ELIZA: Soldier? No. Terrorist, maybe. If there was nothing better to do. Why d'you ask?

D'EON: The way you defer to Justine. As if she were your superior officer.

ELIZA [laconically]: Yeah. She's like a Grandfather to me.

F/X: They stop at the bottom of the steps.

ELIZA: Listen... I can tell the two of you don't get on, all right? But... she's not what you think.

D'EON: I don't *think* she's anything at all.

ELIZA: Meaning?

D'EON: A cipher. A blank slate. Driven by circumstance, rather than her own desires.

ELIZA: And me?

D'EON: One who follows.

ELIZA: Well, thanks for that.

D'EON: I'm sure it's occurred to you that you don't need her.

ELIZA [doesn't speak for a moment]: Let's take a look at what's down here.

F/X: Meandering footsteps, on a hard surface, as they move around the room.

D'EON: Here. Candles. Just snuffed.

ELIZA: Someone left in a hurry. There's another tunnel down that way. Probably goes back up to ground level.

D'EON: A ritual. The candles are arranged in formation. Like a Catholic dedication.

ELIZA: A prayer?

D'EON: A calling, perhaps.

Fade.

4.6

F/X: Prayer-hall acoustic. In the background there's the occasional whirr as one of the automata realigns itself.

JUSTINE: I think you should know, I've already dispatched one of your kind. I hardly consider this a challenge.

AUTOMATON: This insignificant unit is more than aware of your great victory against his reprehensible brother, the Dog.

JUSTINE: "Dog"? And you are...?

AUTOMATON: I regret that I bear the aspect of the pitiful Snake. I also regret that it is my miserable duty to end my Lady's life at the nearest opportunity.

JUSTINE: I thought you were a soldier. Not an assassin.

AUTOMATON: I fear I was called, my Lady. As were these most inadequate soldiers.

JUSTINE: Called by whom?

AUTOMATON: It is our function, according to the principles laid down by our incomparable highest commander, to answer any call given by ritual or protocol. We have the painful honour to be sensitive to such things.

JUSTINE: Your highest commander?

AUTOMATON: Indeed. And now, to their undying shame, these worthless soldiers must do their worst.

F/X: With the usual clicking of joints, several of the automata begin to move forward, advancing on Justine.

JUSTINE: Hardly fast-moving.

AUTOMATON: Yet it is my misfortune to announce that these are merely the rank-and-file of the Munificent Army of Peking. Whereas I, by the grace of my creators, am a Commander of that despicable army.

JUSTINE: I *thought* you looked different.

AUTOMATON: We ignoble Commanders all look different, my Lady. My Brother the Tiger is eight feet from head to toe, while my Brother the Ox is as fat as the beast which gave him his name. Though I am informed, by his inestimable Majesty King George the Third, that we all look alike to him.

F/X: The automata suddenly attack, so not only do the machine-sounds speed up but they're overlaid with the swishing of blades. Justine immediately responds, and there are repeated blows from her shadow-weapon.

Fade.

4.7

F/X: "Shrine" acoustic.

ELIZA: Well, if Bute's taken the back door out then we're not going to catch up with him now. How come British Intelligence is using hard-core ritual, anyway?

D'EON: Mysticism's always been an element of espionage, in your country. Ever since the days when the Queen's spymaster was also her astrologer. You've heard of Casanova?

ELIZA: The lover?

D'EON: The lover. The spy of Venice. Also a ritualist. **[Pause.]** You and he have a great deal in common, I think.

ELIZA: I'd rather not think about that. Look at this. Books. Not a bad library.

D'EON: See. Ledgers. The director's reports to his colleagues in the Star Chamber.

ELIZA: Anything worth reading?

F/X: Minor F/X of books being removed from shelves and pages being turned, continuing through the next few lines.

D'EON: All Service business is recorded here. There should be mention of this machine-army.

ELIZA: Good. We want to know how many there are, and where they're being kept.

D'EON: Unless, of course, your Grandfather can destroy them all before we even have to lift a finger.

ELIZA: You know... sarcasm really doesn't suit you.

Fade.

F/X: Prayer-chamber acoustic. There's a brief burst of swords being swung and metal being ripped apart by shadow-weaponry, before what's left of the automata collapse to the ground in a pile of failing machine-parts and sparking joints. Then there's quiet.

JUSTINE: I think "humble" gives them too much credit.

AUTOMATON: I can only agree. But as this base and dishonourable warrior must remind you, these were merely the footsoldiers. An insignificant escort for a pitiful officer.

JUSTINE: Then you intend to fight me yourself?

AUTOMATON: I must express inexpressible joy at doing so, my Lady.

F/X: More violence, but this time of a more specific kind. There's the lightning-fast *swish* of a blade, quickly followed by what sounds like Justine's shadow-weapon... but the sound's much shorter than usual, suggesting a blunt impact instead of a graceful strike. The idea is that Justine's parried the blow. Then we hear another *swish* and another parry.

JUSTINE: I have to admit, you're a better fighter than the last one.

AUTOMATON: My Brother the Dog was not, alas, made for swordplay.

F/X: A short burst of strikes and blocks. The impression should be is that neither of these two has a definite advantage over the other, so they're being cagey.

JUSTINE: You're all named after animals?

AUTOMATON: My gracious Lady is most -

F/X: Another burst of attacks.

AUTOMATON: - perceptive in that regard. The noble artisans of the fiftieth century, whose names we are not even worthy to speak, gifted us with the aspects of the twelve animals of the calendar. Our first Lord and Master was greatly -

F/X: And again. This time, though, it sounds as if the shadow-weapon is doing the attacking and the machine is doing the defending.

AUTOMATON: - influenced by astrology. His belief was that by investing us with the attributes of those beasts which visited the Lord Buddha, we would attain a balance and unity never before known in warfare.

JUSTINE: There's astrology, that far in the future?

AUTOMATON: My Lady is, of course, correct. We who command the Army of Peking were twelve in number. Each of us -

F/X: Another series of blows, with Justine as the aggressor. This time, the last of the strikes isn't blocked and there's the sound of sparks on metal as the shadow-weapon scrapes the automaton.

AUTOMATON: It is my pleasure to report that my Lady has me wounded.

JUSTINE: You may continue. As long as you're able.

AUTOMATON: Each of us was blessed with a single organic component, taken from the most bounteous animal we were to represent. I, to my everlasting sorrow, have within me the cerebral cortex of the snake.

F/X: Two sudden, sharp attacks from the machine. Justine parries both.

JUSTINE: You're not *that* wounded, I see. I suppose I should have expected trickery from a soldier with the brain of a snake.

AUTOMATON: Shamefully, I possess no more than a fragment. Had I the entire brain of such an animal, the burden of my unworthiness would seem so much less.

F/X: More attacks from the automaton, but this time there are more than anybody might expect... including Justine. It sounds like she's having trouble blocking them all, and after the first half-dozen she lags. The last attack isn't quite blocked.

JUSTINE [surprise more than pain]: *Ahh!*

AUTOMATON: As would the guilt of having to butcher you, my Lady.

Fade.

4.9

F/X: "Shrine" acoustic. Eliza stops turning the pages in one of the books. Possibly we can hear some of the sounds of combat from upstairs.

ELIZA: There. The writing style's a bit archaic, but it's there. It's a complete description of the automata.

D'EON: You read Latin?

ELIZA: Is that in Latin? I didn't notice. Umm... **[mumbling odd snatches of the text]** ...automata were given to the Court by a certain benefactor... "at least a hundred in number"... well, *that's* not saying much. "At least a hundred"?

D'EON: Who was the benefactor?

F/X: Another page being turned, quickly followed by another, then another.

ELIZA: Odd. It doesn't say.

D'EON: Perhaps Bute wished to keep their origin a secret from the rest of the Star Chamber.

ELIZA: Or maybe he wasn't sure. Time-travel can't be an easy concept for him to get his head round.

D'EON: Time...?

ELIZA: Doesn't matter. No mention of where they're being kept, either.

D'EON: Then he may be working to his own agenda. Without the knowledge of the rest of the Service.

ELIZA: That's the impression I'm getting. **[Pause.]** So. Why did you say that?

D'EON: Why did I say...?

ELIZA: About not needing Justine.

D'EON: You disagree?

ELIZA: I know what I *need*. And I know Justine isn't it. But it's not about needing things, is it?

D'EON: I'm sorry. I know too little about your customs.

ELIZA: So? Why did you say it?

D'EON: You have to understand... I'm more than familiar with the exotic. These rituals of yours, these weapons. They surprise me, it's true, but they hardly *shock* me.

ELIZA: But? I'm fairly sure you're going to say "but".

D'EON: The most remarkable things have nothing to do with ritual. Your manner of thinking. Your manner of movement.

ELIZA: Oh, so you're saying I'm remarkable now?

D'EON: Perhaps not by the standards of your own nation. But here, certainly. Among unusual people, you're an unusual woman.

ELIZA: Yeah? Well, so's Justine.

D'EON: She's not a woman.

ELIZA: *You* can talk.

Fade.

4.10

F/X: Prayer-chamber acoustic.

JUSTINE: Then there are twelve of you? Twelve Commanders?

AUTOMATON: There were twelve. Now there are but nine. My Brother the Dragon became a crippled and idiotic thing, many years ago. My Brother the Pig forgot his lowly station, and was taken from us. My Lady herself compromised my Brother the Dog, with great skill and aplomb.

F/X: Justine's on the offensive again. Now it's *her* turn to make a long series of strikes, but they're in an irregular rhythm, as if she's attacking the machine from a variety of angles. Eventually, it fails to block one of her blows and more sparks fly.

AUTOMATON: Once more, you disadvantage me.

JUSTINE: Then do I take it that when all nine of you are dead, your army's going to be powerless?

F/X: The automaton responds in kind. From hereon in the attacks are less rapid, but continuous, underpinning the dialogue between the two duellists (so their speech might occasionally be broken up as they have to dodge and parry).

AUTOMATON: Regrettably, it is not so. Our army is now under the direct control of our most wise but most pitiless commander-in-chief. Even without us, the soldiers may march.

JUSTINE: Even though the ones who built you are thousands of years away?

AUTOMATON: If my Lady will permit the observation, we are both a long way from our homes.

F/X: The fighting stops. If possible, we should get the feeling that this is because the machine's hit a raw nerve - figuratively speaking - and Justine's stopped making any attacks of her own.

JUSTINE: Thankyou, Mr. Snake. I think I've learned everything I can from you.

AUTOMATON: It is my pleasure to furnish my Lady with what little wisdom I possess. However, she speaks as though her victory is assured, and sadly I must now -

F/X: A barrage of shadow-weapon strikes, far more intense than those we've heard so far. The machine attempts to stop them, but although we hear the occasional block we also hear the constant sound of metal being shredded and electronic circuits popping. It's not clear whether Justine has found some kind of new strength, or whether she's just been toying with the automaton all the time. When the attacks finally stop there's a great clattering sound, as the machine falls to the floor in pieces. Then silence.

JUSTINE: Well, then. Eight remaining.

Fade.

4.11

F/X: “Shrine” acoustic.

D’EON: It’s gone quiet upstairs.

ELIZA: Yeah. Justine must have finished the job.

D’EON: Of course. I’m sure she never loses.

ELIZA: You’ve really got a problem with her, haven’t you?

D’EON: All nations manufacture their own heroes. The question one has to ask is, for what purpose?

ELIZA: What’s that supposed to mean?

D’EON: Simply that I’m not inclined to believe in messiahs.

F/X: Justine enters, so maybe a couple of footsteps at the top of the steps, although she doesn’t descend.

JUSTINE: Did you find Bute?

ELIZA: Bute didn’t want to be found. We got his books, though.

D’EON: He shouldn’t be difficult to track. There are places in the capital that attract people with his kind of interests.

JUSTINE: Yes. I’m beginning to think I should become better-acquainted with this city’s customs.

D'EON: If you need a guide -

JUSTINE: Thankyou, Sieur, but if I wanted a guide then I'd hardly ask a foreigner. I think you'll find that I'm far more familiar with the streets of London than *you* are.

ELIZA: Justine -

JUSTINE: Eliza. Take the books to Mistress Culver, or whatever she likes to call herself. It's time I began making connections in this area.

ELIZA: Yeah, 'cos obviously you're the diplomatic one. Are you sure you want the Culver woman to see these?

JUSTINE: The Mistress has offered us sanctuary. We'd be unwise to reject the offer. After all, we have so little home left.

F/X: Justine exits.

D'EON: As I said. Messiahs. I pity the capital, if she's determined to become acquainted with it.

ELIZA: She'll be all right. She just needs roots here.

D'EON: And yet she likes to pretend she's familiar with the city.

ELIZA: Only with the architecture. Not with the people. It's a long story.

D'EON: I'm sure. However, the people of London may not be ready to listen to it.

Fade.

F/X: The sound of a murmuring crowd, not dissimilar to the background noise of the House of Lords. The idea (and it's obviously not going to be *perfectly* clear) is that we're in a lobby of the House, with various members standing around discussing what they've heard in the main chamber. We can hear Sandwich talking to one of the other Lords, but he's some way away from us, so his words are almost lost in the overall mumbling.

SANDWICH: But you can't seriously think... I mean to say, I'd expect the Tories to go along with him, but not Pitt's old mob...

F/X: The Lord mutters something in reply. Against the background noise we can't hear exactly what's being said, but it obviously doesn't put Sandwich at ease.

SANDWICH: I see. Yes. Yes, obviously. Well... I appreciate your candour, of course. My Lord.

F/X: A door opens nearby, and we "follow" Sandwich out of the lobby. When the door closes we're on the other side of it, so the sound of muttering becomes dim and muffled. We now seem to be outside, on the streets of London, as there are vague sounds of traffic (i.e. horse-drawn carriages) in the distance. Sandwich's footsteps move along the street, then stop. He pauses.

SANDWICH: My carriage. Where's my carriage...?

SABBATH [from out of nowhere]: I told your coachman you'd be delayed.

SANDWICH [jumps]: Aah!

SABBATH: Good evening, Lord Sandwich.

SANDWICH: I know who you are! You're one of *them*, aren't you?

SABBATH: One of what?

SANDWICH: You're a Serviceman! You're working for... **[realising]**
...what's wrong with your voice?

SABBATH: Yes, I apologise for that. It must be quite distracting. Now, I believe you're on your way to see the head of your Order. You've arranged a rendezvous with her on the riverside. Not your first tryst with a lady in that particular spot, but certainly the first of any great importance.

SANDWICH [too quickly]: I don't know what you're talking about.

SABBATH: Nonetheless, I'd appreciate it if you could pass on a message. A warning, if you like.

SANDWICH: A warning?

SABBATH: Tell your superior that I know who she is, and what she's planning. Tell her that I have the advantage in that respect, simply because the Great Houses haven't seen enough of this era to work it out for themselves.

SANDWICH: What Houses? What are you talking about?

SABBATH: Please, just try to remember what I say. At this moment in time I happen to work for the Great Houses, at least as much as I work for the Service. You could call me a double agent, I suppose. But fortunately for your Mistress, my duty to the Houses is just a matter of tracing a certain... criminal element. I don't intend to interfere with any of her other plans.

SANDWICH: Look... I don't know what all this is about, but it's got nothing to do with me. I'm not some sort of *diabolist*, I'm not involved in anything dangerous -

SABBATH: Then perhaps your Order will let you retire. Your Mistress is involving herself in a dangerous intrigue, Lord Sandwich. Once I've completed my mission here, I hope she still feels she's chosen her allies wisely.

SANDWICH: Allies?

F/X: From the background, one of the carriages approaches.

SABBATH [retreating]: Your carriage, my Lord.

SANDWICH: Wait a minute!

F/X: The carriage draws up, the horse drawing to a halt next to Sandwich.

SANDWICH [calling after him]: What do you know about my trysts?

Fade.

4.13

F/X: Another street in the city. Again, there are carriages in the distance, but judging by the footsteps there's also the odd pedestrian. A clock chimes nine somewhere nearby. We hear one particular pair of footsteps approaching.

JUSTINE: Excuse me -

F/X: The footsteps don't stop, and move away again.

JUSTINE: Not very civil.

ANNABEL [background]: They don't like to stop for us. Not around here.

JUSTINE: I'm sorry?

ANNABEL [approaching]: Not this close to Westminster. You know what happens to men who stop and talk to women this close to Westminster?

JUSTINE: I have no idea.

ANNABEL: They get reputations for being the kind of men who stop and talk to women this close to Westminster.

JUSTINE: Excuse me. I don't wish to be impolite, but am I right in saying that you're a... *demimondaine*? A prostitute?

ANNABEL: Please! I'm a *courtesan*. I've got principles.

JUSTINE: Then I don't think we've got a great deal in common.

ANNABEL: Oh, I know what you are. You're the *Grandmadame*.

JUSTINE: I beg your pardon?

ANNABEL: We've all heard. About what happened at Medmenham Abbey. About what you did to the Servicemen. Can't say any of us are sorry.

JUSTINE [slight pause]: I have to admit, I'm surprised. You know?

ANNABEL: We *all* know. They've got a special arrangement with women like us, up at the Abbey. Sometimes they take us off to the Medmenham by the cartload.

JUSTINE [not convinced]: I see.

ANNABEL: D'you ever meet Mary Culver? Before she... you know.

JUSTINE: No. No, not before.

ANNABEL: She was a great Mistress. Real witch, though. A hundred years ago they would've made her a priestess.

JUSTINE: A *hundred* years ago? In the seventeenth century?

ANNABEL: Didn't they have priestesses, back in those days?

JUSTINE: If you'll excuse me... you don't seem to have much grasp of history.

ANNABEL: Never needed one. Well, maybe not a hundred years. A long time ago, though. You know what Mary told me? She told me in the old days, it was women like us who ran the temples. Men used to line up and... you know... make donations. Just like the collection in church. Makes you stop and think, doesn't it?

JUSTINE [uncertain]: There are different kinds of ritual, I suppose.

ANNABEL: That's what Mary said. She said these days, it's all about blood. Different sort of offering. Maybe that's why she did what she did.

JUSTINE: And I assume that's why you don't have much time for the Service?

ANNABEL [snorts]: Bunch of old gets. We used to have this city in the palms of our hands a few years ago. You got yourself seen with a Duke or a Minister, and everyone'd be lining up at your door to beg for your time. *That's* all done with now. I mean, the Abbey at Medmenham, that's just play. You dress up in the costume, you pretend to do kiss the Devil's arse for a couple of hours, it's nothing. It's the Service you've got to look out for. You know what I mean.

JUSTINE: Actually, I'm not sure I do.

ANNABEL: What I mean is, they take it *seriously*. With the masks and the candles and Christ knows what else. They'd tie you up and slit your throat as soon as look at you.

JUSTINE: I understand. And Mary Culver is... *was*... the last of her kind, is that what you're saying?

ANNABEL: Maybe she was. Maybe *you* are.

JUSTINE: I told you. I'm not -

ANNABEL: You're like Mary, though. You're a priestess. You know what people are saying about you, don't you?

JUSTINE: Go on.

ANNABEL: They're saying you got yourself out of Hell, and now you've got the Devil after your backside.

JUSTINE: I don't happen to believe in Hell.

ANNABEL: Don't think anyone does, in our line of work. But you've got to be superstitious. Knowing the kind of people *we* know. I just meant to say... everyone's on your side, around here. Us ones who know about you. That's all.

JUSTINE: Thankyou. I'm sure I appreciate the support. [**She doesn't sound sure.**] Although I'm afraid I'm lost. The streets don't seem to be quite the way I remember them.

ANNABEL: Why, where are you trying to get to?

JUSTINE: St. James's. Angel Court. I used to live somewhere very much like it.

Fade.

F/X: Still outside, although the sounds of traffic are a long way away now, maybe only just audible in the distance. The atmosphere doesn't exactly suggest "pastoral", but there's a river running nearby and we get the sense of being set apart from the rest of the city.

MISTRESS: It's goose paté. It's got geese in it. You like geese, don't you?

F/X: Small unimpressed "mrrp" noise from her cat.

MISTRESS: No. I didn't think much of it, either.

F/X: Two people approaching across the grass. If the sounds of feet on grass are audible, anyway.

ELIZA [approaching]: Nice cat.

MISTRESS: Thankyou. I made her myself.

ELIZA: Did you make the food, as well?

MISTRESS: It's not food. It's a picnic. There's a difference.

ELIZA: *What* difference?

MISTRESS: Imagery. Sit down and try the salmon. It's made from the same recipe as the cat.

ELIZA: Catchy slogan. So, you don't want to know how your secret mission went?

MISTRESS: You did reasonably well but not brilliantly. Otherwise I'd have heard about it by now.

ELIZA: Well, we got through it all right. Once Justine and d'Eon stopped tearing chunks out of each other.

MISTRESS: Are you really surprised?

ELIZA: Explain?

MISTRESS: Justine can't stand the thought of a man masquerading as a woman. Or a woman masquerading as a man. It strikes a raw nerve. Where *is* Justine, anyway?

D'EON [approaching]: Our Saviour's getting to know the city. She's hoping to find Bute.

F/X: Somewhere on the edge of the scene, a carriage is drawing up.

ELIZA: We know a couple of things about the machine-army. Sadly, not where it's been stationed.

MISTRESS: Sandwich should be able to help us out there. He's got friends in the right circles.

ELIZA: Oh, is *that* what he's for.

F/X: Another set of footsteps, hurrying across the Park.

MISTRESS: Sandwich. Sit yourself down. Have a... have something to eat.

SANDWICH [flustered]: It's the King. I think he's gone mad.

D'EON: If so, it's hardly unexpected...

SANDWICH: I've just been at Westminster. The King's appeared before Parliament. Both Houses. He said... he said something about a new

era for Britain. He wants Parliament's approval to bring in troops. Troops from outside the country. But when he says *outside*, I think he means... well, you know.

ELIZA: You mean, he's passing some kind of law?

MISTRESS: He doesn't need to. But if he wants to make his army official, then it's going to be easier if he goes to Parliament first. They already think he's turning into the great dictator.

D'EON: But he hasn't told them the *nature* of this army?

SANDWICH: No. Just that they've been brought in from some foreign country or other.

MISTRESS: The Undiscovered Country, by the sound of it.

D'EON: Then surely, Parliament won't give him its support?

SANDWICH: They are. I mean, they will. Somehow he's convinced half of the Whig factions to come round to his side. Or not to argue with him, anyway.

ELIZA: The Service is probably having a word behind the scenes.

D'EON: Not necessarily. The Whigs might not think much of the King, but they think a lot of the war. Any extra military force is going to get their approval. Once they've made a few token objections.

SANDWICH: The King said there's going to be some kind of parade. Tomorrow morning.

D'EON: Parade?

SANDWICH: Along the Mall. By St. James's Park. He wants to march his army towards the city. There hasn't been anything like it since the

coronation.

ELIZA: A couple of hundred automata stomping all over London? Won't that cause a bit of a fuss?

MISTRESS: I think that's what he's planning. Apparently, we don't have much time left.

SANDWICH: And... there's something else.

MISTRESS: Like what?

SANDWICH: A message. For you. I... don't think it's very good news.

Fade.

4.15

F/X: Another street in the city. The traffic's closer here, but not exactly busy. We only hear one set of feet on the cobbles, and they're Justine's. After a while they stop. Justine pauses.

JUSTINE [cynical, and apparently not to herself]: Curious. I'd always believed there was just a lake in the middle of St. James's Square. The Egyptian obelisks must be a new addition.

F/X: The general background noise continues, but there are no sounds of anybody else in the area so it's not clear who Justine's talking to.

JUSTINE: Please, don't bother to hide. I know you're there.

F/X: Brief footsteps on the paving of the Square. Sabbath stepping out into view (i.e. he's been standing behind something). When he speaks, there's that *other* voice underneath his words again, but it's so vague that we can only just make it out.

SABBATH: Perhaps I'm just playing for time.

JUSTINE: Mr. Sabbath. You seem to have changed.

SABBATH: My hair?

JUSTINE: Your *body* is of more interest, I think.

SABBATH: I'm flattered. And... curious. You can see the difference in me?

JUSTINE: I have a certain advantage. You appear to have suffered a transformation. Not unlike Mistress Culver.

SABBATH: The same ritual. Except, as I understand it, that Mistress Culver was... shall we say, *occupied*... by one of the leading presences from your Homeworld.

JUSTINE: Hardly *my* Homeworld, Mr. Sabbath.

SABBATH: Nevertheless. Whereas Mistress Culver seems to be under the influence of one of the more *striking* powers, I'm simply a conduit for... I think the best English term would be a "familiar". A lapdog of some description. Apparently it only has the one purpose, and I think you can guess what it might be.

JUSTINE: To assassinate me, by any chance?

SABBATH: To bring you to justice. One way or another.

JUSTINE: I see. And the "renovations" to this Square? Your work as well, I assume?

SABBATH: Oh, you were quite right. The monoliths are a new addition. They mark out the boundaries of the area.

JUSTINE: Area?

F/X: Unexpectedly, there's a great cracking, tearing sound from nearby. It's as if something's emerging from the lake in the middle of the Square, forcing its way up through the bed and displacing both rock and water on its way. The "aftershock" of this, a slight crunching sound as the ground and the waves start to settle, can be heard throughout the following lines.

JUSTINE: The lake...

SABBATH: Yes. Now I've found you, the familiar's instructions are to contain you. It's interesting, don't you think? What it's doing to the Square. The same thing it did to the inside of my body, but on a much larger scale. Complete reconfiguration. Sending new instructions to the architecture.

JUSTINE: Making me a prison, perhaps?

SABBATH: Not exactly.

F/X: The ground cracks open again, but this time it's closer, right "underneath" Justine. There's the sense of something else, some large piece of architecture, suddenly pushing its way up from under the ground.

JUSTINE: *Ahhhh!*

SABBATH: Please, don't be alarmed. You of all people should be used to this sort of thing. And I wouldn't recommend trying to get down from there, either.

JUSTINE [winded]: And this is... where I'm to be confined?

SABBATH: Actually, it's the dock.

JUSTINE: Dock?

SABBATH: As I understand it, you're to be brought to trial.

F/X: More cracking noise, all around the stereo picture, these ones less violent. New masonry is pulling itself into place across the Square, some of it in the lake, some of it on dry land.

SABBATH: It may take a few minutes to construct the Courtroom. And to summon the jury. As I said, I'm just playing for time.

JUSTINE: Mr. Sabbath... you obviously think of yourself as an intelligent man. Do I take it that you're *happy* to be controlled by this "familiar"?

SABBATH: Not exactly controlled. I assure you, my personality is much the same as always.

JUSTINE: My condolences.

SABBATH: Oh, I might yet surprise you. Besides, the Service has always been curious as to the origins of Faction Paradox. I'm learning a great deal.

F/X: Another sound becomes audible over the sound of settling architecture. It's very faint, very far away, but it seems to be a kind of high-pitched gibbering: voices, although they're probably not speaking in English. They have the same sort of acoustic as the voice that's inhabiting Sabbath. Right now they sound as if they're high up, elsewhere, maybe not quite real.

JUSTINE: That noise...

SABBATH: The jury being sworn in, so to speak. They'll be here soon. I suggest you stay still and wait. Soon the Courtroom will be finished, and cut itself off from the Earth altogether. Once we're in the jurisdiction of the Great Houses we can begin the trial.

F/X: The gibbering's starting to become more excited.

SABBATH: At least, that's what I'm being told.

Fade.

4.16

F/X: Riverside background.

ELIZA: The Great Houses? Here?

MISTRESS: As if things weren't irritating enough already.

ELIZA: They're coming after us, aren't they?

MISTRESS: Well, they're certainly coming after Justine. No offence, but I don't think you're quite as high on their list of priorities.

ELIZA: Fine. We'd better go and find her.

MISTRESS: She probably knows already.

ELIZA: What?

MISTRESS: You're missing the point, aren't you? If House Lolita's agents are after Justine, then they're not paying attention to the rest of you. Which means that now's the time to move against the Service. Sandwich?

SANDWICH [not expecting to be involved in this]: Oh, er... yes?

MISTRESS: You've got contacts in the city. Try to find out what Bute's planning. If he's got an automaton army at his disposal, then it doesn't matter how unpopular he is with the people. He'll have the King's ear permanently.

ELIZA: So little home left...

MISTRESS: I'm sorry?

ELIZA: What Justine said before she left us. We've got so little home left.

D'EON: I don't understand...

ELIZA: The Eleven-Day Empire was based in London. Well, a pirate copy, anyway. So when she left us...

SANDWICH: Perhaps she just went to see the sights. She *is* a visitor here.

ELIZA: Sights my arse.

SANDWICH: Pardon?

ELIZA: She's heading for Angel Court. St. James's. That's where her quarters were, back in the Empire. What's between here and there?

SANDWICH: Well... Charing Cross. St. James's Square, of course.

ELIZA [starts to move away]: Right.

MISTRESS: Eliza!

ELIZA [stopping]: What?

MISTRESS: The army's our first priority. You think you can remember that?

ELIZA [even further away]: I know, I know.

F/X: Eliza departs.

D'EON: Not that I wish to become overly involved, but... should I go with her?

MISTRESS [giving up]: Oh, if you must. Sandwich? Have you got your pistol?

SANDWICH: You *did* say I'd need it...

MISTRESS: You will. It might keep you alive a few seconds longer.

SANDWICH: Oh.

D'EON: If I may ask, Mistress Culver... you claim to be a lady of some power yourself. Might I ask why *you* won't be joining us in this crusade?

MISTRESS: Because I can't be seen to be acting in this, that's why. Because if the Great Houses find out I'm here, they'll probably sterilise the entire area. Satisfied?

D'EON: I think I understand. You mean, it's a matter of politics.

MISTRESS: Oh, you should know how it works, you must have read the stories. Gods aren't supposed to get involved with mortals. It's in the rules.

D'EON [amused]: Then you're claiming to be a God now?

MISTRESS: Second cousin. Once removed.

Fade.

4.17

F/X: Elsewhere in the city. Closer to the heart of the capital, so more traffic and background noise.

GEORGE: Mmm. Westminster.[**Sniffs.**] Always been a bit heathen for my tastes. Still, a sovereign needs his debaters, I suppose.

SOLDIER [approaching]: Your Majesty.

GEORGE: Ah! You're one of Bute's men, aren't you?

SOLDIER: Your Majesty... a message. From our agent inside Parliament.

GEORGE: Well, give it here, man, give it here.

F/X: Minor F/X of the King unfolding a slip of paper.

GEORGE [reading]: Hmm. The numbers in agreement with His Majesty still express concern for... yes, yes, I know all that. The friends of William Pitt complaining about... well, they're always complaining about something, aren't they? But the overall feeling... ah. Good. [**To the soldier.**] Wait there, man. I need to have a word with the Queen. She's just waiting in the carriage there.

F/X: The King walks a few paces, and then there's the sound of a carriage door opening.

GEORGE: My dear? Good news. Doesn't look like Parliament's going to make a fuss after all. So, we can have our procession first thing tomorrow. Quite splendid.

LOLITA [because, as it happens Queen Charlotte sounds exactly like Lolita in every respect]: Oh, yes. That *is* good news.

GEORGE: It'll be like the changing of the guard. I mean to say, I know how much you like a good show, mmm?

LOLITA [amused]: That's right. I do, don't I?

GEORGE: Well, quite. Quite.

Fade.

4.18

F/X: City background, the same we heard around St. James's Square. And there's still the vague crunching sound from all around, the new masonry settling into place. At this stage the gibbering-from-beyond isn't close enough to make an impression.

ELIZA: St. James' Square Square. Not the way it looks on the maps.

D'EON: This can't be the Square. There are walls -

SABBATH [from on high]: As I understand things, the Courtroom's walling itself off from the rest of the Earth. I wouldn't stay here too long, if I were you.

ELIZA: Oh, not *you* again. I see they've given you a nice big podium to sit on.

SABBATH: Yes. I've got to admit, I do enjoy these trappings of office. They're so ridiculously overblown.

D'EON: If you're the judge, then might we know who's on trial here?

JUSTINE [not quite so on-high]: I think that should be obvious.

ELIZA: Justine...?

JUSTINE: And Mr. Sabbath is right. It's not safe here.

ELIZA: In what way, not safe? Just generally, or...?

SABBATH: You mean, you haven't noticed?

F/X: A crunching sound from somewhere nearby, another new wall reaching up out of the ground. It's only a little one, though, and it isn't particularly menacing.

ELIZA: Noticed what?

SABBATH: The voices.

F/X: Indeed, the gibbering is now becoming noticeable.

JUSTINE: The Great Houses are coming.

D'EON: Eliza. The Gallery.

ELIZA: Gallery? What Gallery?

SABBATH: The Courtroom's nearly complete. Growing from the Square like a seed. Fascinating, isn't it?

ELIZA: There are... *things* up there...

SABBATH: The jurors in the Gallery. Making their presence felt. I don't suppose you'd like to join them?

JUSTINE: They're almost ready. You should go.

ELIZA: Justine... you're carrying the Grandfather's shadow, you know what they're going to do to you -

JUSTINE: And I think someone should stay behind to fight the King's army, don't you?

ELIZA: We don't even know where the King's army *is*.

SABBATH: It's at the Queen's House.

ELIZA: I'm sorry?

SABBATH: The Earl of Bute tried to keep it secret. Although for a nominal head of the Service, he's particularly bad at keeping secrets.

ELIZA: And why should we trust you?

SABBATH: Because I'm an impartial judge?

JUSTINE: Listen to him, Eliza. Go where he says. Find the army.

ELIZA: Without you? How are we going to take out the whole force without heavy artillery? Listen, Sabbath. I don't know what they've told you, but you're not working for any kind of God here -

SABBATH: Oh, I'm well aware of that. Please, credit me with some intelligence.

ELIZA: You're helping House Lolita! And do you have any idea what House Lolita wants to do to this planet?

SABBATH: Have *you*?

ELIZA: Well... no. But it can't be any good, can it?

F/X: Another wall springs up. This one is closer than the last, suggesting that the architecture's moving in on Eliza and d'Eon. Bit worrying.

D'EON: We should leave this place.

SABBATH: Yes, you should. I'd take a step back, in your position.

ELIZA: Justine -

JUSTINE: Go, Eliza.

D'EON: The Gallery...

JUSTINE: *Go.*

F/X: Another wall springs up, but either it's *very* big or *very* close because the crunching noise is louder than any we've heard so far. The cracking of the pavement is so pronounced that d'Eon has to shout over it.

D'EON: Back!

F/X: The wall continues to sprout, and the pavement continues to crack. The crunching sound doesn't stop, as if the entire ground is ready to give way at any moment.

ELIZA [shouting over the noise]: Justine!

F/X: The noise reaches a crescendo, suggesting that the wall's stretching further and further out of the ground... and then, abruptly, it ends. When it stops there's complete calm, no after-effect of settling architecture, no suggestion of the ground giving way. We hear the ordinary, run-of-the-mill background noise of the city, exactly as it was before Sabbath appeared. It takes Eliza and d'Eon a while to work this out.

D'EON: St. James's Square.

ELIZA: Same as it ever was.

D'EON: He said the Court was *growing* from the Square, true? It must have blossomed. Split off like a bud.

ELIZA: Well, that's it, then. We've lost Justine.

D'EON: Sabbath spoke as if she were a criminal...

ELIZA Wait a minute. [**Calling out.**] Sandwich! Over here!

F/X: Sandwich is approaching, on foot, huffing and puffing as he hurries over the cobbles.

ELIZA: You missed the good bit. Do you know where the Queen's House is?

SANDWICH: You mean, Buckingham House?

D'EON: The Queen's official residence. The King bought it for Her Majesty some months ago. While she was carrying the Prince.

ELIZA: Sabbath said the army was there. Is that possible?

SANDWICH: At the Queen's House? Why would it be there?

ELIZA: Maybe it's nice and roomy.

D'EON: You think the Queen knows?

ELIZA: I doubt it. All right, then. Buckingham House, via Westminster. Where do we get a cab?

Fade.

4.19

F/X: Another street. The city background is quieter here, suggesting a backway of some kind. We hear hurried feet on the cobbles - Bute - and when he comes to a halt he's breathing heavily. He's presumably been running for some time.

BUTE [to himself, flustered]: Sabbath's rooms. That's it. Sabbath's rooms.

Fade, leading into...

F/X: A door bursting open. Bute entering Sabbath's rooms at speed.

BUTE [calling out]: Sabbath!

F/X: He slams the door shut, then crosses the room. There's no other sound here.

BUTE [still calling]: Sabbath, listen to me. I don't care what kind of... *thing* you think you've got inside you. The Order's after us. Those Faction people... **[tailing off, stops shouting]** ...Sabbath?

F/X: Having crossed the room, he opens the *other* door in Sabbath's quarters.

BUTE: Are you -

F/X: As the door opens, we're suddenly surrounded by the background noise of the Courtroom. Not only is the ground still making uneasy crunching noises, but the gibbering sound is now louder than ever: no longer something distant and unreal, it sounds like whatever's making the noise has well and truly arrived. Bute reacts quite badly to this.

BUTE: AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!

SABBATH: Lord Bute. You know, you really shouldn't be here.

BUTE: Mother of God preserve us... Sabbath, what have you conjured up? This place...

SABBATH: Don't worry, sir. It'll be sealed off from Earth soon enough. As a matter of fact, I think you've found the last doorway in. You'd probably better leave before it closes.

BUTE: We're not on Earth? [**Trying to take all of this in.**] In the name of God. This is a courtroom, isn't it? This is where the trials are held for... [**a horrible thought seems to strike him**] ...Sabbath, is this... purgatory?

SABBATH: I'm afraid it's not that simple. And I wouldn't worry, sir. You're not having your sins judged. However great they may be.

JUSTINE: Apparently, that's *my* fate.

BUTE: Good God! It's her! The witch!

JUSTINE [**ignoring him**]: Although I seem to be on trial for a form of original sin. Considering that the crimes were committed by my ancestors.

BUTE: Sabbath, I beg you, please. Come back to... to the world. Sandwich and his Order know all about the army. They're merciless!

SABBATH: Ah. This would be the army you refused to tell me about, I take it?

BUTE: This isn't the time for arguing! The King's ready to parade his machines through the streets of London. Somebody has to stop him!

JUSTINE: How strange. I understood that *you* were the one controlling the automata.

BUTE: Me? I despise them! They're not fighting men, they're... *wrong*. The public hates me enough already, without the government unleashing monsters on them.

JUSTINE: They're an aberration to history, certainly. Then if you're not the one whispering in the King's ear, then who is?

BUTE: I don't know. It doesn't matter! Sabbath, I'm imploring you, man...

SABBATH: Yes. Interesting. I'll have to think about it. Of course, at present there are other things to be dealt with.

BUTE: *Other* things?

SABBATH: Look up to the Gallery, Lord Bute.

BUTE: The Gallery...

F/X: The gibbering becomes more pronounced as Bute's attention is directed towards it.

BUTE [hushed]: Oh, dear Christ.

SABBATH: Leave now, my Lord. The door won't be there forever. Besides, I'm sure His Majesty will want you at his side when his army marches out. You *are* supposed to be his closest confidant.

BUTE: But I don't -

SABBATH: Leave. **[A pause.]** *Leave*, Bute.

F/X: The sound of a door closing. As soon as it closes, the background noise stops and we're returned to the peace and quiet of Sabbath's rooms. All we can hear is Bute, breathing heavily and trying not to panic.

BUTE [to himself]: It was purgatory. It had to be purgatory. No, it couldn't have been. Couldn't have been...

F/X: The main door bursts open again.

SOLDIER [entering]: My Lord. His Majesty King George requests the pleasure of your company.

Fade.

F/X: The sound of hooves on cobbles is all around us. We're riding in the carriage with Eliza and company.

D'EON: But surely, if it's only a ceremony... if the King's not planning any military action with these machines...

ELIZA: It'll change *everything*. If the general public sees a hundred-odd robots marching down Pall Mall, then history's going to go off the rails for good. And if House Lolita wants it that way, then we don't.

SANDWICH: We can't stop it. If Parliament's not going to argue...

ELIZA: Then we sabotage the army before it marches. God. Since when have I been the one who has to *infiltrate* the secret ninja base?

D'EON: I'm sorry, my English isn't good enough -

ELIZA: Neither's mine.

SANDWICH: We can't just burst into Buckingham House!

ELIZA: Why not? We'll say we're tourists. Anyway, we've got one shadow-weapon, one pistol, and the best swordsman in France.

D'EON: *Third* best swordsman.

ELIZA: Close enough.

SANDWICH: The Queen's House is guarded!

ELIZA: Are the guards human?

SANDWICH: Well... yes.

ELIZA: Then it's not guarded.

SANDWICH [under his breath]: Oh, Lord.

Fade.

4.22

F/X: City background. Westminster. Several pairs of booted footsteps are approaching.

GEORGE: Bute! Now, where have you been hiding, old friend? Mmm?

BUTE [approaching, flustered]: Your Majesty, I have to protest!

GEORGE: Protest? Why on Earth would you do a thing like that? Everything's going swimmingly. Swimmingly! Parliament's just given the nod to my ideas for the new army. Nothing in our way now, eh?

BUTE [thrown]: Given the nod? But... I wasn't there.

GEORGE: Didn't need to be, old friend, didn't need to be. They knew who to side with, all right.

BUTE: But I'm the first minister! I'm the Leader of the House of Lords!

GEORGE: And no King could wish for a better one. Now, we're just on our way to Buckingham House. Join me in my carriage, mmm?

BUTE: "We"?

GEORGE: The Queen and I. Well, it *is* her house, you know. **[Aside.]** Help me up into the cab, would you, man?

F/X: The door of the King's carriage is opened. There are a few awkward scrabbling noises as both the King and Bute climb into the confined space.

BUTE [as he enters]: Your Majesty, if you've ever valued my advice before then please value it now. This army of yours... oh. Good day, your Highness.

LOLITA: Lord Bute. Coming with us to inspect the troops, I suppose?

BUTE: Er... yes, your Highness. I'm sorry, your Majesty, perhaps we shouldn't discuss affairs of state in front of Queen Charlotte -

GEORGE: Oh, nonsense. My wife doesn't even speak a word of English. Do you, my dear?

LOLITA: No. Not a single word.

BUTE [pause as he tries to figure this out]: What?

F/X: The city background fades as the carriage door closes. A whip is cracked, and the carriage begins to move off.

GEORGE: Bute, I know you're a nervous old Scot sometimes, but there's really no need to worry. My most trusted advisor has assured me that now's the time to introduce the world to my little Peking army, and by God, I've got no reason to doubt that advice.

BUTE: I'm sorry, you must be mistaken. I never advised any such thing...

LOLITA: Oh, don't be ridiculous. He doesn't mean you.

BUTE [floundering]: It... your Majesty, is it really wise to let your wife involve herself in these affairs?

GEORGE: She's just excited, Bute. Wants to go and see the machines, don't you, my dear?

LOLITA [amused]: Oh yes. I like the machines. They're keyed to my central processing core, you know.

BUTE: Your Majesty, I don't understand why her Highness -

LOLITA: Haven't you worked it out yet, Bute? My husband here isn't following a word I'm saying. Isn't that right, you German halfwit?

GEORGE [oblivious]: Well, quite, my dear. Quite.

BUTE [slowly realising]: The army...

LOLITA: My idea, I'm afraid.

BUTE: They're under your control?

GEORGE: Of course they're under my control! Wouldn't be much of an army if they weren't all under my control, would it?

LOLITA: Yes. They're under my control. They're primed to follow my orders above all else, and auto-activate when I'm within a hundred metres of any of the command units. And please try to close your mouth, Bute, you look ridiculous like that.

BUTE: Those machines are an abomination. They've got no part in the history of God's Earth.

LOLITA: History? You've been talking to the wrong people. And really, you should know that you can't stop the march of technology. You're due for an industrial revolution soon anyway. Believe me, I'm just bringing things forward by, ohhh, three-thousand years or so. Not that I expect you to understand anything I've just said, of course.

BUTE: I understand enough. Enough to know you can't possibly be the Queen of England.

GEORGE: Are you feeling quite well, Bute?

LOLITA: Don't be such a bore. Of course I'm the Queen. You recommended me yourself, remember? Nice little Hanoverian princess, you said, won't argue and won't cause much trouble. Your words, not mine.

BUTE: Queen Charlotte would never -

LOLITA: Queen Charlotte wouldn't do anything, the hopeless little vegetable. You can call me Lolita, if you like. Although I warn you, if you do then nobody else will have a clue what you're talking about.

BUTE: Lolita?

GEORGE: Lolita? Who the jiggins is Lolita?

LOLITA: You see? Well. On to Buckingham House, then. As His Majesty said, it *is* my home.

Fade.

4.23

F/X: We're now entering an enormous underground space: the same enormous underground space as in Volume Three, when the King and Bute inspected the automaton army. There are slow, echoing footsteps on a stone staircase, as Eliza, D'Eon and Sandwich carefully make their way down.

SANDWICH [awed]: Good God.

ELIZA: Yeah. You people have really got a thing for big underground empires, haven't you?

SANDWICH: I assure you, *my* people had nothing to do with this.

F/X: They reach the bottom of the stairs, but their footsteps continue to echo as they move along the enormous cavern-like interior.

D'EON: Explain, please. This building used to belong to the Duke of Buckingham, true? Did *he* build all of this?

ELIZA: Doubt it. This looks like House Lolita's work. You know, I went to Buckingham Palace once on a school field trip. They didn't show us this bit.

D'EON: Eliza? This way, I think.

F/X: The footsteps stop. There's a shocked pause.

SANDWICH [appalled]: Bute... he was telling the truth. It's an army...

ELIZA: Yeah. How many d'you reckon? Three-hundred? Four?

SANDWICH: To build them all, though. It must have taken *centuries*.

ELIZA: Mass-production. It's the wave of the future.

D'EON: They're not moving. They look more like statues.

ELIZA: We know they've got command units. They stand out a mile. I say we take out the officer class while they're still asleep.

F/X: There's movement in the background. It's a long way away, but it could be the joints of one of the automata clicking into life. Soon there are short, sporadic sounds of movement coming from all around the cavern, as if the first few machines are getting warmed up and flexing their limbs.

ELIZA: Something moved.

F/X: There's the first definite sound of one of the machines whirring into life. It's quickly followed by another, then another. None of the awakened machines seem to be close at hand, but the clockwork noises echo around the area.

D'EON: More than *something*, I think.

SANDWICH: They're coming to life!

ELIZA: Fantastic. My first *Jason and the Argonauts* moment.

D'EON: They're still sleepy -

F/X: D'Eon's sword is unsheathed, then swings through the air. It impacts against the metal of one of the automata, but there's no change in the whirring sound from all around them.

D'EON: It's still moving. The sword didn't stop it...

SANDWICH: We have to go!

ELIZA: I hate to remind you, but this is kind of what we came here for.

SANDWICH: Not to fight a whole army -

ELIZA: Draw your gun.

SANDWICH: There are hundreds of -

ELIZA: *Draw your gun!*

D'EON: Eliza!

F/X: The sound is still becoming louder as more and more of the machines wake up. We can hear mechanical legs taking their first steps

forward, some of the machines finally advancing on the group. (The characters may have to raise their voices slightly to be heard over this, but they're panicking anyway so that makes sense.)

ELIZA: They're still waking up. Sandwich, you cover me.

SANDWICH: Cover you? With what?

ELIZA: Oh, for... If anything gets too close, shoot it, all right? D'Eon -

F/X: A brief *swish* of d'Eon's sword. Sparks fly from one of the machines, and with a dull crunch something hits the ground.

D'EON: I can sever their limbs. It doesn't stop them, but...

ELIZA: Fine. Then we take out as many as we can.

SANDWICH: This is madness! You can't stop *all* of them...

ELIZA: We can delay them. If we're lucky, we can take half of them out just in time for Justine to escape and come to the rescue.

SANDWICH: You think she'll escape?

ELIZA: How should *I* know?

F/X: The noise continues to build, and build, and build, until all we can hear is a cacophony of clattering limbs and clicking joints. The sound becomes quite oppressive before we fade into...

4.24

F/X: ...a different noise, but just as oppressive. The background of the Courtroom. Although the architecture has stopped shifting, the gibbering's louder than ever, a chorus of excited non-human voices. Nonetheless, Sabbath's quite audible over the din even without raising his voice.

SABBATH: Well. The Gallery seems to have assembled. There's no reason to delay proceedings any longer.

JUSTINE: Pardon me, *your honour*. Those are the jurors?

SABBATH: "Moderators" might be a better word. Representatives of the six leading Houses, and of a dozen further Houses selected by the ruling assembly. It's all perfectly legal, I assure you.

JUSTINE [not sounding very respectful at all]: With respect to the Court... the Gallery doesn't appear to me to be made up of "representatives" at all. It seems to be made up of monsters.

F/X: The noise from above becomes more excited still. The Gallery evidently isn't too happy with that observation.

SABBATH: The accused is forgetting. The Homeworld's been at war with its enemies for over half a century now. And war makes certain demands on the House bloodlines.

JUSTINE: I see. Then this is what fifty years of fighting has done. Turned the Great Houses into Houses full of beasts.

F/X: This gets an even worse response from the Gallery.

SABBATH [still vaguely amused by all of this]: If you're trying to taunt the Court, then I'm afraid you're wasting your time. The honourable representatives in the Gallery are only doing what protocol demands of them. They've come in ceremonial battle-form.

JUSTINE: I knew the timeships were capable of changing their skins. I did *not*, however, know that their pilots had the same advantage. Perhaps the Homeworld is starting to blur the line between its weapons and its own people.

F/X: Actual howls of protest from the Gallery, although it's hard to guess what those howls might mean.

SABBATH: Well, I'll take that to be the accused's opening speech in her defence.

JUSTINE: If I'm entitled to an opening speech then I'd like to finish it. I'd like to ask the Court a question.

SABBATH: Go on.

JUSTINE: How many of those in the Gallery... those who wish to decide my fate here... are followers of House Lolita?

F/X: The Gallery seems a bit put out by this. The voices drop a little, as if they're muttering darkly.

JUSTINE: Because it's my understanding that the ruling Houses are now dominated by Lolita and her servants. I only wonder which Houses have been chosen to judge me.

SABBATH: Oh, the Gallery was chosen quite fairly.

JUSTINE: I'm sure it was. And is Miss Lolita herself not going to be present? I'm surprised she's not here to see this *impartial* Court find me guilty as charged.

Fade.

4.25

F/X: Back to the cavern of machines, but this time we hear the sound of the army from a distance. As we'll soon discover we're actually "above" the scene, watching the automata from a point overlooking the cave floor.

LOLITA: This way. Along the balcony.

F/X: Three sets of footsteps on the balcony, which clangs as the characters move along it, suggesting a metal walkway.

GEORGE: I've said it before, but dash it all, I'll say it again. They're magnificent, aren't they, Bute? Absolutely magnificent.

BUTE: Your Majesty... you honestly can't see anything wrong here, can you?

GEORGE: Wrong? My word, no. Perfect machinery. Quite perfect. If only the country ran that smoothly, eh?

LOLITA: You're wasting your time, Bute. I've put him in a personalised natural-time envelope. He still sees the Queen he was *supposed* to have.

BUTE: Supposed to have...?

LOLITA: Mmm. His precious Queen Charlotte. You almost feel sorry for him, don't you? History's just passing him by. He really *is* in a world of his own.

BUTE: This is treason!

GEORGE [warningly]: Bute!

F/X: Footsteps end.

LOLITA: It's all right, George. Why don't you go and make sure everything's ready for the parade tomorrow? There's a good King.

GEORGE: Ah! The parade. Excellent idea. Yes.

F/X: The King happily moves away along the balcony, his footsteps ringing on the metal. Lolita waits for him to go before she answers Bute.

LOLITA: Oh, it's far more than treason. But don't worry about His Majesty. He'd be insane by middle-age anyway. And to be honest with you, the *real* Queen Charlotte had so little personality that overlaying her with my own identity was frankly a mercy. Believe me, history's lost nothing there. She might as well have never existed, which is ironic, when you think about it.

BUTE: You're one of *them*, aren't you? One of those... *things* that possessed Sabbath.

LOLITA: I'm what we like to call a Newblood. Your Mr. Sabbath tried the Supplication ritual, I suppose?

BUTE: He used a piece of glass...

LOLITA: Primitive. Personally, I go where I please. I'd never get anything done if I had to wait for some idiot to summon me. Besides, I can occupy multiple bodies at the same time.

BUTE: You... can be everywhere at once?

LOLITA: Oh, Bute. You people are so parochial, it's almost funny. But just try to imagine it. Me, in all my majestic glory, spreading across the continuum like one great big nervous system. Occupying a token body on every world where I've got influence, in every time-zone that matters. A million different faces, but one great history. It's almost exciting, isn't it?

BUTE: There are a *million* of you?

LOLITA: Not yet. I thought I'd start here. I haven't quite settled in yet, of course. That's why I thought I'd dig myself in with the automata. And they do seem to keep the King happy, don't they? Anyway, I thought I might as well start adjusting history now. You've got to make a statement.

BUTE: You talk of history as if it were a *thing*...

LOLITA: Well, of course I do. I'm going to be one, when I grow up. Myself and all my bloodline.

BUTE: Dear Lord. How many things like you *are* there?

LOLITA: Only two, at the moment. And trust me, the other one's nothing to concern yourself with. But personally I'm planning on raising a big family.

F/X: The King's footsteps return from along the balcony, this time at speed.

GEORGE [approaching, distressed]: Philistines! Damnable philistines!

LOLITA: I'm sorry?

GEORGE: Look! Look at them! Down there in the hall!

F/X: We focus on the noise of the automata, and begin to realise that the sound of Eliza's shadow-weapon can just be heard over the racket of clockwork joints.

BUTE: The Faction...

LOLITA [irked]: A *Cousin*. The rest of the Faction's currently residing just to the left of my alimentary canal.

GEORGE: They're smashing up my machines! My beautiful machines! Can't you do anything to stop them, Bute?

BUTE [smoothly]: I'm sure the automata are more than able to defend themselves, your Majesty.

LOLITA: Oh, yes. I'm sure they are. Still... let's help them a little, shall we?

4.26

F/X: The sound of the machine army moves into the foreground, so we're back on the floor of the cavern with Eliza and company. The machines are advancing, and every so often there's a *whoosh* as one of them swings its blade, but Eliza's shadow-weapon is obviously doing a lot more damage. Even so, despite the frequent sounds of fizzing machinery and falling automata we should still get the sense that the group's seriously outnumbered. A gunshot signals that Sandwich is firing on the horde.

SANDWICH: We've done enough. We have to go.

ELIZA: We can't back out of this now. There's still another five-hundred of them left.

SANDWICH: That's exactly my point!

D'EON: Sandwich, to your right!

SANDWICH: Ahh!

F/X: A *whoosh* as a blade swings past Sandwich, but it's soon followed by a gunshot.

SANDWICH: It's no good. The bullets don't kill them -

ELIZA: You don't have to kill them.

F/X: A shadow-weapon strike, close by. The automaton sparks, then hits the ground.

ELIZA: Just force them back. *I'll* kill them.

D'EON: He's right. You're the only one doing them any real damage...

ELIZA: Keep chopping their arms off, that's all.

SANDWICH: Do you know how long it takes me to reload?

ELIZA: Shut up!

F/X: As Eliza speaks, we realise that the noise of the army has fallen away a little. There are still any number of joints clicking away, but none of the machines seem to be moving. There's a nervous silence from the group as they notice this.

ELIZA: They've stopped coming.

SANDWICH [taken aback]: The King and Queen...

ELIZA: What?

SANDWICH: Up there. The balcony...

ELIZA: Oh, Christ.

D'EON: If His Majesty wishes to show us mercy -

ELIZA: He might. She won't.

D'EON: The Queen?

ELIZA: That's not the Queen.

SANDWICH: I assure you, it is.

F/X: An entirely new sound enters the arena. It's a lot like the noise Lolita makes when she dematerialises (q.v. Volume Two), but perhaps not quite as impressive.

D'EON: *Eliza -*

ELIZA: Get down!

F/X: The clanking of joints from nearby, and a sudden, unexpected blade attack from one of the automata. A shadow-strike from Eliza quickly dispatches it.

D'EON: It came out of nowhere...

F/X: Several more of the materialisation noises, in quick succession.

SANDWICH [panicking]: More of them!

F/X: The machines immediately attack. There's a barrage of shadow-weapon blows from Eliza, taking the machines apart, and she's still swinging when she speaks.

ELIZA: It's Lolita. She's moving them around like toy soldiers.

D'EON: Lolita...?

F/X: One or two more materialisation noises, but for the most part what we hear are the sounds of the machines advancing. There are blades being wielded on all sides.

SANDWICH: We're surrounded. Please, if we surrender -

ELIZA: No longer an option. D'Eon?

D'EON: Agreed. To the death.

ELIZA: You're so French.

F/X: The machines get closer, Eliza's shadow-strikes grow more intense, and the sounds of battle continue to build. And so, at this crucial point in the fight, we fade back into...

4.27

F/X: The Courtroom. The squealing from the Gallery has settled at a muted, but still noticeable, level.

SABBATH: I take it that you understand the charges against you?

JUSTINE: I understand the charges, *your honour*. I've simply committed no crime.

SABBATH: You carry the shadow of the Grandfather of House Paradox. You are, by your own custom, guilty of all the Grandfather's crimes. For the purposes of this trial, you are in effect the Grandfather. You acknowledge that?

JUSTINE: I'm sure I'm honoured. But I don't feel the Protocols are the issue, do you?

F/X: Protest from the Gallery. If they were human they'd probably be shaking their heads and going "no no no, this won't do at all".

SABBATH [not even remotely shocked]: You're arguing with the law?

JUSTINE: No. I'm arguing that the law isn't being upheld. Is the Court aware of House Lolita's activities on Earth? A world whose history is far more delicate than most, as I understand things.

SABBATH: I'm sure you'll be only too glad to enlighten us.

JUSTINE: It's in the Protocols of the Great Houses to maintain known history, wherever possible. Lolita's interfering with that history, and I don't

believe any charges are being made against *her*. If the Council wants to make exceptions to the law, then I see no reason *I* shouldn't be an exception. Given that my character is nowhere near as questionable as Lolita's.

F/X: A few shrill little howls of outrage from the Gallery.

SABBATH: I'd remind the Grandfather that this is a time of war. The Protocols can be suspended, in a military crisis.

JUSTINE: Then I'd ask for the Protocols which cover *my* supposed crimes to be suspended. Especially as Lolita's guilt is connected to my own. If it weren't for her, I never would have taken on the Grandfather's shadow.

SABBATH [apparently leading her on]: But Lolita isn't the one on trial. Unless you're claiming that her testimony's relevant...?

JUSTINE: Yes. I believe I am. May I call her as a witness?

SABBATH: Grandfather, this isn't a British court. The cardinal judge decides which testimony is relevant and which witnesses are to be summoned.

JUSTINE: Then may I suggest to you, your honour... that *you* call her?

F/X: There's a dramatic pause before Sabbath speaks. In that time, there's an anxious chattering from the Gallery. Not too loud: they want to hear what Sabbath says.

SABBATH: As a purely impartial judge in this matter, I think that's a good idea.

F/X: The Gallery explodes into excited conversation. Presumably.

F/X: Fade into the cavern background, as heard from the balcony. From below there are the constant sounds of combat, and the odd dematerialisation/ materialisation.

LOLITA [calling out, mocking]: Cousin Eliza! Don't tell me you've lost your little friend?

BUTE: It doesn't make sense. The machines are moving, but... I can't see them moving...

GEORGE: Well, it looks like we've got those intruders surrounded. Er... there's no chance of the machines *hurting* them, is there?

LOLITA [mutters]: Perish the thought.

BUTE: You're doing this!

LOLITA: Of course I am. There's a cortex transceiver inside every soldier. It links them directly to the central processor.

BUTE: The what?

LOLITA: To *me*, Bute. I've keyed them all in to my dematerialisation matrix.

GEORGE: That's the spirit!

LOLITA: Shut up, your Majesty. Now, I think I've toyed with them enough. If I just move, oh, a hundred or so more soldiers into a good attack position...

F/X: From below, a much louder dematerialisation sound than expected. Possibly a large number of machine-troops being teleported all at once. However, the sound is vaguely discordant, as if something's gone wrong with the process somewhere (oh, just detune the sound effect at the end or something).

LOLITA [to herself]: Something's wrong.

GEORGE: My word. Half the army's just vanished. They can't desert, surely?

LOLITA: I can't get them back. Why can't I... [**sounding slightly panicked**] ...my dematerialisation matrix. Something's overriding it.

BUTE: You're ill?

LOLITA: Don't be ridiculous! I can't *get* ill. I just -

F/X: The dematerialisation noise again, this time from Lolita herself. But it's slow and drawn out, the idea being that she's gradually fading away.

GEORGE: Now, Charlotte, don't make a scene. There's nothing less dignified than a woman who tries to be the centre of attention.

LOLITA: I'm dematerialising, you idiot! Why can't you see... [**fades out.**]

F/X: The dematerialisation ends. Lolita's gone.

GEORGE: Well, where on Earth did *she* go to?

BUTE: I'm... really not sure.

4.29

F/X: Back to the cavern floor. Combat continues on all sides.

SANDWICH: They've gone! Half of them have gone!

F/X: A series of shadow-weapon strikes, close at hand.

ELIZA: I'd noticed. Thanks.

D'EON: We can get back to the stairs...

ELIZA: We've got the advantage. Let's use it.

F/X: More machines advancing. Eliza starts to take them apart. Crackling circuitry all round.

D'EON: There's still well over a hundred left. We can't keep fighting.

SANDWICH: She's right. Sound the retreat!

F/X: A sudden calm falls over the scene. There are no sounds of attack from the machines, just the general whirring of their bodies. A moment's peace as the group takes stock of this.

ELIZA: - they've stopped again.

SANDWICH: The Queen... she's not there any more.

ELIZA: Wait. **[Calls out.]** You. You there. Can you talk?

AUTOMATON: Though my words may be insufficient in the extreme, I have the incalculable pleasure to say that I can.

ELIZA: Are you feeling all right?

AUTOMATON: As my most glorious Lady has no doubt noticed, we have no orders to attack. Since the most villainous yet sublime Lady Lolita was present, we have been mere humble slaves to her central processor. In her absence, we have the shame of saying that we no longer control our own programming in military matters.

ELIZA: So what you're saying is... and I want to make sure we're perfectly clear on this... if I hit you, you won't even try to hit me back?

AUTOMATON: My incomparable Lady grasps the situation with perfect clarity. She is, I have no doubt, truly one who belongs to the Year of the Cat.

ELIZA: I didn't think there *was* a Year of the Cat?

AUTOMATON: Indeed.

ELIZA: Uh-huh. Well, as long as you're happy. Ready?

AUTOMATON: I joyously await my Lady's terminal attentions.

F/X: Big shadow-weapon swing from Eliza. The automaton crackles in a satisfying manner, then loudly hits the ground. (Ideally it hits the ground in two parts, so we can tell that Eliza's basically sliced it in half.)

SANDWICH: It didn't defend itself?

ELIZA: None of them will. D'Eon? We've got God-knows-how-long before Lolita gets back. Let's get to work.

F/X: A long, long series of weapon-blows from Eliza, as she lays into the machines. The whirring goes on, but nothing moves and nothing fights back. This general loudness fades into...

4.30

F/X: Courtoom background. The steady noises from the Gallery are overlaid by the sound of Lolita materialising.

LOLITA [furious]: And what, exactly, do you think you're doing?

SABBATH: You're Lolita, current head of House Lolita?

LOLITA: I'm *busy*. Put me back where I was, or I'll rip your arms off.

F/X: Hushed whispers from the Gallery, in a sort of “oh, I think she’s going a bit far there” way.

JUSTINE: I don’t think the witness is respecting the Court, your honour.

LOLITA: *Witness?*

SABBATH: You’ve been summoned here to offer testimony to the Court in the matter of Grandfather Paradox. Are you prepared to give evidence?

LOLITA: Do you have any idea what you’ve interrupted? Right now those interlopers are probably -

SABBATH: *If you’d like to remember, you’re here by the request of the legal process and in accord with the Protocols of the Homeworld. You’re not objecting to the law, I hope?*

JUSTINE: Not in front of all the other Houses, anyway.

F/X: General muted chitterings from above. The Gallery’s equivalent of nervous coughing.

LOLITA [gritting her teeth]: Of course not. I’ve got the greatest respect for the legal process.

SABBATH: Grandfather? You wanted to question this witness?

JUSTINE: Yes. About the very events we seem to have interrupted.

LOLITA: Your honour... is this relevant to the case?

JUSTINE: Questions about Earth. And the legality of what you’re doing there.

LOLITA: “Legality”?

SABBATH: It’s been suggested that you, yourself, are in breach of the Protocols.

LOLITA [ready to take control again]: Very well. Let’s talk about the Protocols, shall we? Your Honour... I have a statement to make before I give evidence. I’m entitled to that, aren’t I?

SABBATH: Certainly. If you have something of relevance to say.

LOLITA: Oh, I’ve got something of relevance to say. Don’t you worry.

4.31

F/X: Fade into the cavern, as heard from the balcony. The dim sounds of slashing weaponry and toppling machines from down below.

GEORGE [calls out]: Man! Yes, you, man! Crowden, is it?

SERVANT [in the background]: Your Majesty...?

GEORGE: Go and get men! Men, you understand? Not machines. Men!

SERVANT [moving away]: Yes, your Majesty.

GEORGE: Look at them down there, Bute! Vandals! Destroying my army! I’ve got a good mind to go down there myself and -

BUTE [hurriedly]: I don’t think that would be a good idea, your Majesty.

GEORGE: I tell you, this is the last time I’ll have anything to do with these Faction types. And isn’t that the Earl of Sandwich, with the pistol?

The impudence of it. We should have him locked up. Locked up!

BUTE: He was going to be our new ambassador in Madrid...

GEORGE: Well, I hope he stays there!

BUTE [after an awkward pause]: Your Majesty... I just wanted to ask you. Everything that's happening here... the army... Faction Paradox... the Queen... does it all strike you as being *right*?

GEORGE: I don't think I'd be the head of God's church in this land if He didn't expect me to be *right*, Bute. What's the Queen got to do with anything?

BUTE: I was... thinking about something she said. About her bloodline.

GEORGE: Mmm? Oh, well, she's a strong family woman. Good job too. It's best to have a big royal family. Dash it, Bute, just look at those barbarians!

BUTE: I was thinking... your son, Prince George...

GEORGE: What about him?

BUTE: Is he *all right*, your Majesty?

GEORGE: Of course he is. Fine, strapping boy. A King in the making. Do you really think this is the time for talk, Bute? That's Britain's great military hope going to waste down there. Where have those blessed men got to?

BUTE [flatly]: Yes, your Majesty. If you'll excuse me...

F/X: Bute hurries off along the balcony.

F/X: Back at ground level, Eliza and D'Eon still playing havoc with the automata. There are very few clicking, whirring sounds to be heard now. Presumably the army's been more or less decimated.

ELIZA [calling from the background]: That's the last of them over here. D'Eon?

D'EON: I'm nearly finished. Their heads roll easily, once they're standing still.

ELIZA [coming closer]: Sandwich? Any sign of Lolita yet?

SANDWICH: No sign of the Queen, no. But why do you call her -

ELIZA: Because I can see her properly. Here, let me help.

F/X: Eliza keeps slashing with her shadow while she talks.

SANDWICH: You do realise, I hope, that the King's still watching us?

ELIZA: So? Is he armed?

SANDWICH: He'll consider us traitors...

F/X: Eliza stops slashing. Nearby we hear d'Eon topple the last of the automata with a sword-strike, and then there's quiet in the cavern. Not a thing moves, clicks or whirrs.

D'EON: That's the last of them.

ELIZA: Well done, you've saved France. And *you*, Sandwich, have got something to tell the rest of your Order about. So stop complai -

F/X: A gunshot, apparently fired from a distance. Immediately followed by a second.

D'EON: The stairs!

ELIZA: Cover! Get under cover!

F/X: The echo of footsteps in the cavern as Eliza, D'Eon and Sandwich scurry for cover. There are more gunshots as they run. (Remember that we're dealing with muskets here, so it's hardly going to be rapid-fire. But there do seem to be several weapons pointing in the group's direction.)

D'EON: Servicemen.

SANDWICH: And they *are* fighting back.

ELIZA: Plus, they're human. We don't want to kill any more of them than we have to.

F/X: More gunshots, this time from another direction. They hit the walls of the cavern nearby.

ELIZA: Damn. They're on the balcony as well.

D'EON: Only four on the stairs. If we rush them -

SANDWICH: Rush them? They've got guns!

ELIZA: So have you.

D'EON: They use English muskets. Slow and inaccurate. We might be able to fight our way past them, if you use your shadow-weapon.

SANDWICH: "Might"?

ELIZA: You're big on surrender, aren't you, Sandwich? All right, when I say go.

D'EON: Good luck to you.

SANDWICH: God have mercy...

F/X: Another volley of shots, irregular but close together.

ELIZA: Three, two, one... *go*.

F/X: The echo of running footsteps, Eliza and company breaking cover. There's another gunshot, then a simultaneous shadow-strike and sword-strike that seem to whistle right by us before we quickly fade into...

4.33

F/X: The Courtroom. The Gallery's quieter than usual, paying close attention to Lolita's speech.

LOLITA: ...so let me remind you, just in case you've forgotten while you sit there in your best battle-forms. This is *war*. This is *the* War. Normal Protocols were suspended fifty-two years ago, when the War Presidency broke out the weapons of mass genocide and the first soldier saw full active service in ten-thousand generations. Yes, I've interfered with the history of Earth. I don't deny it, and I'm not going to pretend that I'm anything but proud of it. Don't forget, everything I've done I've done with the ruling Houses' approval. And without a word of complaint from the War King. Is anybody here seriously going to tell me that this... *creature* in the dock is above that authority?

F/X: Some chirps of what might be "no" from above.

JUSTINE: If the law can be suspended for you, Miss Lolita, then surely it can be suspended for me.

LOLITA: Don't be ridiculous. You're an irritation. You're one desperate member of a dead House. Don't kid yourself that the Protocols are going to be changed on *your* say-so.

JUSTINE: But they can be on yours? After all, I believe you're the only member of House Lolita. A one-woman bloodline.

LOLITA [snappish]: That'll change. I've got children. Once they've been through the initiation -

JUSTINE: Children? And may I ask where those children came from?

F/X: Some nervousness in the Gallery. They don't like where this is going.

LOLITA: They're mixed-breeds. Do you expect me to deny it?

JUSTINE: Fathered by individuals from other species? From worlds where you have influence?

LOLITA: There's nothing wrong with that. Oh, hadn't you heard? The Protocols against breed-mixing were revoked two-hundred years ago. Sorry to disappoint you.

SABBATH: Are we to understand that you're infiltrating the bloodlines of other worlds? Planting your children throughout history?

LOLITA: Yes. That's exactly what you're to understand.

SABBATH: Children such as... for example... Prince George? The son of the British King?

LOLITA: Oh, really. I have no idea why the *criminal* in the dock is being allowed to change the subject like this. Just think about it. Eighty years ago, the ruling Houses started creating alternative Homeworlds for us. The War's made our original Homeworld... well, let's not say a liability.

Let's just say, less secure than it was. We've changed other worlds to suit our own needs before now. We're already changing history, one piece at a time. And you expect me to be sorry now? You expect me to apologise for taking the process one little step further? You expect me to *regret* turning the bloodlines of other species to our own ends?

F/X: The Gallery is clearly behind her by this point, even if we can't tell what they're saying.

LOLITA: What I do is necessary. For the survival of our species and for the survival of the Protocols.

JUSTINE: And for the good of your own bloodline, of course.

LOLITA: Don't try to turn my own world against me. My children might be half-breeds, but you're not even that, are you? So please, don't pretend to be defending the good of the Great Houses.

JUSTINE: I wouldn't dream of it.

LOLITA: Good. Then let's wrap this travesty up, shall we? Let me ask the Gallery one question. Is there anyone here... anyone at all, other than the *traitor* on trial here... who takes exception to what I've done? Who seriously believes I've gone too far in ensuring the security of the Houses?

F/X: A fairly quiet response from the Gallery, the only gibbering noises we hear presumably being ones of "well, not *me*".

LOLITA: There. I hope that settles things.

JUSTINE: Indeed. Thankyou, Miss Lolita.

LOLITA [mildly surprised]: That's all?

JUSTINE: Oh, yes. You've told me everything about yourself that I wanted to know.

LOLITA [pauses, then laughs]: You never really had a thought of winning this trial, did you?

JUSTINE: Perhaps you'd like to ask the judge to dismiss you now.

LOLITA: It won't do you any good, of course. The Court's going to tear you apart.

SABBATH: If the Grandfather has no more questions...

LOLITA: Obviously she hasn't. Can I go?

SABBATH: Feel free.

LOLITA [under her breath]: Amateurs.

F/X: Lolita instantly dematerialises.

SABBATH: Now. Grandfather? Is there any more testimony you feel the Court should hear?

JUSTINE: Would it make a difference?

F/X: Much (metaphorical) shaking of heads from the Gallery.

JUSTINE: I thought not. Very well, then. No, I have nothing more to say.

SABBATH: In that case, there's no reason for any further delay. **[Delivering the final statement.]** With the consent of myself, as cardinal judge... and in accord with all the Protocols of War-Time Court... the Gallery has permission to debate its judgement.

Fade.

F/X: The cavern, heard from the balcony. There's no whirring from below now, no sound of battle at all, although the echoing, scuffling noises we *can* hear suggest that several people might be sweeping up the debris. After a few moments, Lolita materialises.

LOLITA [irked more than angry]: Oh, good grief.

GEORGE: Mmm? Oh, there you are, Charlotte. I'm afraid you've missed all the adventure. Dratted irritating, if you'll excuse my language.

LOLITA: Destroyed. All of them destroyed. Typical.

GEORGE: Yes. Yes, I know. Still, the men are picking up the pieces. I was thinking of showing our Mr. Harrison some of the machineries. Heaven knows what a watchmaker would make of all this.

LOLITA: Oh, do be quiet, you half-mad little runt.

GEORGE: I know, I know. That's just what I told Bute. Setback to the whole nation.

LOLITA [sighs]: Well, I suppose it's only a minor irritation. At least the Faction's out of the way for good. I suppose I'd better start cleaning up the mess.

GEORGE: Now, don't be silly, my dear. The men are there to do that for us.

LOLITA [moving away]: That's not the kind of cleaning up I meant.

F/X: Footsteps on the metal balcony as Lolita storms off.

GEORGE: Ahh... Charlotte?

LOLITA [pausing]: Yes?

GEORGE: Is everything... is everything quite all right, would you say?

LOLITA: “All right”? Why? Is there any reason why it shouldn’t be?

GEORGE: Oh, it’s... nothing. Something Bute said. That’s all. Nothing to worry about, I’m sure. You know how I worry about young George and all.

LOLITA [levelly]: I see.

GEORGE: But... I mean to say... if there *were* something wrong. If there *were* a problem with, you know. A problem here. In our household.

LOLITA: Well?

GEORGE: You *would* tell me about it. Wouldn’t you?

LOLITA [flatly]: Of course I would. Darling.

GEORGE: Yes. Yes, of course you would. Stupid thing to say, really.

LOLITA [long pause for consideration]: Hmm.

F/X: Lolita finally departs, clanging her way along the balcony.

Fade.

4.35

F/X: Riverside background. This time it’s day, so we can probably get away with a bit of birdsong and suchlike. Mistress Culver's cat can just be heard purring in the foreground. Eliza and company approach across the grass.

ELIZA: You're still here, then.

MISTRESS: Believe me, I'm going to be around for a while. And pull your shadow in, you're scaring the cat.

ELIZA: We've lost Justine. You know that, don't you?

MISTRESS: Technically. Then again, you've done a pretty good job of keeping Lolita in check.

ELIZA: She's married to the King!

MISTRESS: She's still vulnerable. No army to protect her while she puts down roots here.

ELIZA: And the fact that she's indestructible doesn't bother you, at all?

MISTRESS: Well, *anyone* can be indestructible. The point is, she's trying to be in a million places at once. Now you've taken her soldiers away she's going to have to slow down and put more of her power into *this* aspect of herself.

D'EON: Excuse me, I'm not sure I understand. You're saying that we've saved... what? The country? The world?

MISTRESS: Not exactly the world. History, maybe.

ELIZA: Yeah. Which is kind of ironic, seeing as I'm supposed to be working for Faction Paradox. You think *I* see this as being a good day's work?

MISTRESS: Yes. I think you do.

SANDWICH: I'm sorry, but this has gone far enough. I was just supposed to give sanctuary to Cousin Justine. Nobody said anything about

fighting a war against my own Queen and country. What's Dashwood going to say when he gets back from his sojourn?

D'EON: And you're forgetting, Mistress, that I'm in the employ of a foreign court. My interest in this "Lolita" of yours extends only as far as the threat she poses to France.

ELIZA: And I'm damned if I'm trying to take on the whole of the Homeworld if Justine's gone. This is *her* adventure, remember? She's the one with the great big shadow.

SABBATH [background]: Then perhaps you should concentrate on Justine.

ELIZA [the first to speak, although all present make disquietened noises at Sabbath's sudden appearance]: I don't believe this.

MISTRESS: Interesting move. But you're startling my cat.

SABBATH: I apologise. I thought you could do with a little information.

SANDWICH: You're working for the Service!

ELIZA: Plus there's the small problem of you being a hunter-killer for the Homeworld. You know. Not that I like to bring it up.

SABBATH: A *former* hunter for the Homeworld. Now the Houses have dealt with Justine, they don't have any further use for an agent on Earth. And to be honest, I think I learned more from them than they did from me.

ELIZA: It's because of you that we've lost her...

SABBATH: It's also because of me that Miss Lolita was distracted at the crucial moment. If it hadn't been for that, you never would have defeated the automata.

ELIZA: You can't be serious.

MISTRESS: He's telling the truth. I've seen the reports from the trial.

ELIZA: What? When?

MISTRESS: Sabbath... are you telling us you did that deliberately?

SABBATH: Let's say I gave legal procedure a push in the right direction.

D'EON: I was under the impression that you were... pardon me... possessed. Working for these Great Houses of yours.

SABBATH: True. But only as an agent of the Protocols. My own personality still held a certain sway. Please, don't forget. My first duty's to my own people, and unlike Miss Lolita I happen to be telling the truth about that.

MISTRESS: You knew you had to get her away from Earth...

SABBATH: And as long as I could do it according to the Protocols, the familiar in control of my body had no reason to stop me.

ELIZA: Yeah, well, thanks but piss off.

SABBATH: You can always get her back.

SANDWICH: I'm sorry, I don't understand this at all. I thought Justine had been, ahh...

SABBATH: Sentenced by the Court. To complete the prison sentence begun by the original Grandfather of House Paradox.

ELIZA: Prison?

SABBATH: I'm not sure of the details. If you'll excuse me, there's still a lot I have to grasp about this universe of yours. I understand there's some form of... rock. Suspended in space.

MISTRESS: The Houses' prison-world.

SABBATH: As you say. Your friend was sentenced to... I think the best way of putting it in English is *sent to sleep* there. In perpetuity, I believe.

ELIZA: And we're supposed to trust you on this?

SABBATH: There's no reason for you *not* to trust me. We may not exactly be on the same side, but we're certainly not enemies. Although we may have enemies in common. **[No reply from anyone.]** Well. I'll take my leave of you. That's a very nice Angora Blue you've got, Mistress Compassion.

MISTRESS: Thanks.

SABBATH: I assume you made her yourself?

MISTRESS: She was one of the first ones I did. Does it show?

SABBATH: No. Not to the untrained eye.

F/X: Sabbath departs.

MISTRESS: Well. I think I've made my point. The truth is, you've got a home base here now.

ELIZA: I'm not a soldier.

MISTRESS: No. You're the resistance. And you, *Sieur*. Do any *other* of King Louis's spies know what you know? Is anybody *else* going to put up a fight against Lolita?

D'EON: I have no objection to siding with you. When it suits me.

MISTRESS: Spoken like a professional.

SANDWICH: But... what about me? I'm not involved in this.

MISTRESS: You're a member of the Order of Saint Francis. You chose this path because you wanted something exotic. Because you looked at all those old Greek ruins and thought, "ohh, wouldn't it be great if *I* could be right there in the middle of history". And now you are. You're involved. I mean, the history books are going to show that the King made a speech in Parliament that he shouldn't have made, but people are just going to put that down to the mental disorder. And maybe there's going to be the occasional story about Chinese marauders at Buckingham Palace. But that's about the worst of the damage, so far.

SANDWICH: And what about us? Our battle with the machines? Will history remember us for *that*?

ELIZA: Sandwich... I hate to tell you this, but you know those snacks you always have brought to your desk while you're working? Where you stick the beef between the two slices of bread?

SANDWICH: Er... yes?

ELIZA: Don't take this the wrong way, but as far as history's concerned that's the most important thing you'll ever do

D'EON: So. We're soldiers for posterity now.

MISTRESS: It's starting to look that way. Eliza?

ELIZA [after a moment's consideration]: We go after Justine first. We break her out of this prison, if we can. *Then* we'll talk about attacking Lolita.

MISTRESS: Fair enough. **[To all.]** Well, that seemed fairly painless, didn't it? Ladies and gentleman, we're an army.

SANDWICH [cynical]: And that's what you say we're doing? "Fighting the good fight"?

MISTRESS: Oh, trust me, it's worse than that. This isn't the good fight. This is the *great* fight.

ELIZA: Y'know, sometimes you sound just like Lolita.

MISTRESS: It's a family thing. Sorry about that.

4.36

GRAMS: Slow fade in to closing music.

NARRATOR-MACHINE: So begins the Year of the Cat, at least if the listener to this inconsequential story can believe in such a year. For the cat represents that which does not follow a tradition, and if it belongs in a time then it is a time only of the uncertain and the disharmonious, when the unenlightened sleep as history passes them by. It is, if it pleases my Lords and Ladies, a time of no time at all. **[Pause.]** Although the cat itself, being a poor and dumb creature unenlightened by the Buddha, would have no understanding of its part in things.

GRAMS: Closing music.

F/X [after the music fades]: The cat says "mew".